Issue #1

Anemoia

Clisson Castle

A zine by Anusha Rung
It is fascinating how anywhere we go, even (perhaps especially) in tiny villages, people have a rich, intricate history to share. For a moment, listening to them, it seems like we are at the centre of the universe. And when you think of it, we are. Every hamlet is the most important because it is where history began in that particular part of the world. But, as seems to be the rule, only the cities with the loudest mouths have elbowed their way through the centuries into lasting fame and honour.

I have always had a special affection for quiet, discreet places that, if you make the effort to explore them instead of the usual asphalt jungles, reveal an extraordinary historical tapestry that gives them their unique place in the world.

When I am in the heart of a thousand-year-old village, discovering its folklore, art, architecture, victories and tragedies, an indescribable feeling overtakes me. I find myself in a sort of trance, as if every emotion ever felt within the weatherworn walls are seeping into me. It is as if the history of the place is weaving itself around me, making itself mine.

For a long time, I wondered what this eerie phenomenon was, without ever thinking of looking it up, because I could not put it into actual words. Then, one day, not so long ago, I stumbled across the term "anemoia", which means longing for a time you have never known or a place you have never been to.
It was a moment of revelation. I was not alone. Other people had had similar experiences.

Like many people, I am not a fan of slavery, torture, capital punishment and other such medieval delicacies. However, beyond this, whenever anemoia seizes me, all I can feel is the humanity of the people who were there before me – their hardship, fears, love, anger, joy. Their spirit, the vibrant life that ran through their veins. The space they occupied. The seeds of hope they left behind. Everything that makes us more alike than we think.

This feeling of connection with our ancestors (in the broadest sense of the term) is what I wish to share with you.

Edit:

As an aside, my ancestors certainly did not live in a castle. Some of them were lucky to have a roof over their heads. And they most definitely did not, at any point in their indentured lives, venture anywhere near Brittany. However, thanks to their resilience, I am here today, a free citizen who has been lucky enough to visit dream-like places they never did, and who has the luxury of transforming the pragmatic reality of medieval castles into the stuff of neo-Gothic novels.
“Inanimate objects, do you then have a soul
That bonds to our soul and compels it to love?”
Alphonse de Lamartine, *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, 1830
The Château de Clisson is located in the French town of Clisson, within the historical province of Brittany. It dominates the left bank of the Sèvre Nantaise river.

The first Lords of Clisson settled in the castle in the 11th century. However, the edifice as we know it was built by Guillaume de Clisson two centuries later.

In the late 14th century, it housed the dramatic Olivier IV de Clisson and Olivier V de Clisson. Legend has it that the ghost of Jeanne de Clisson, wife of Olivier IV, still haunts the place today.
After 1420, the fortress became the property of the Duke of Brittany. Later on, up until the 17th century, the Avaugour family resided there. Sadly, it was partly burnt down during the War in the Vendée.

From the 19th century on, Romantic artists were inspired by the ruins. In 1924, the remains of the castle were classified as a historic monument by the French government. But it was not until the 1960s that restoration work was undertaken to salvage the vestiges of a vanished glory.
Castle ruins evoke a grandiose era that does not bleed seamlessly into our own. The magnificence that shines through brittle remains tells of a conception of space, of materials, of the earth, that is very far removed from today's shoebox style. We may be awed or amused by medieval lord's flamboyance. Memories of childhood fairytales in which the prince and princess lived happily ever after in their grand castle may come flooding back.

Castle ruins are also a powerful reminder of our fragility and impermanence. We can build all the fortresses we want, death will ultimately claim us. Assuming cannonballs do not blow our home to shreds first, it is condemned to an excruciatingly slow process of decay that bystanders who have yet to be born will observe with detached fascination, much like one observes an agonizing lion in a zoo.

Our home is so much more than a material possession. It is an extension of our body, of our identity even. It is where our family is. It is where we belong. So, when we see an ancient home standing there in ruins, exposed to the elements, brutalized by enemies, time and indifference, should we try to salvage or restore it? End its agony once and for all, and build a new structure in its place, either to honour or to forget it? Or should we leave it as we found it while we were just passing by - leave it to its fate, to the unborn people who will bury it, along with its ghosts, in five centuries?
Last witness standing
Useless pile of rocks
Object of borrowed nostalgia
Beautifully broken relic
Redeemed succubus
Bled dry by amnesic victims
See me through a neomедieval kaleidoscope
Stare at my tattered body
Like you would an anachronic trainwreck
And dress it up in clichés
But you will always be on the
outside looking in
Through my sightless windows
That let the sky in
And let the rain wash off
Centuries of greed
And let the sun bathe me in a halo
That will always be beyond your
grasp
Crumbling is not an instant's Act
A fundamental pause
Dilapidation's processes
Are organized Decays —

'Tis first a Cobweb on the Soul
A Cuticle of Dust
A Borer in the Axis
An Elemental Rust —

Ruin is formal — Devil's work
Consecutive and slow —
Fail in an instant, no man did
Slipping — is Crashe's law —

Emily Dickinson
In 1794, during the French Revolution, the medieval town of Clisson, along with its castle, was burnt down. Those who were not massacred having fled, Clisson remained a ghost town for the next few years.

In 1798, Pierre and François Cacault, two Frenchmen who had been driven out of Italy by anti-republican rioters, were charmed by Clisson and its valley and settled there with a friend, François-Frédéric Lemot. Greatly influenced by Italian culture and architecture, they rebuilt the town from scratch on the model of Tuscan villages. This explains its anachronic, motley aspect that takes the visitor completely by surprise and stands in such stark contrast to the ageless solemnity of the castle.

Clisson as we know it today rose from its ashes more than 220 years ago. One can only wonder how many layers of history sit folded in a deceptively neat pile atop this quaint fragment of Brittany.
Crumbling is not an instant’s Act by Emily Dickinson

Photo of river and castle by Christel Sagniez

Artwork by Venita Oberholster